

Security takes off with Avira



The safety of an airport also relies on the security of its IT systems. The experience at Catania-Fontanarossa airport is another thumbs-up for Avira AntiVir.

It is the largest airport in southern Italy in terms of passenger traffic, and sixth in the country, with just under six and a half million people passing through it in 2010. Catania-Fontanarossa plays an essential role in linking Sicily to the rest of the country and to many destinations on medium-haul flights in Europe and beyond, exceeding Palermo stopover by nearly two million passengers, thanks in no small part to the vast enlargement and modernization programme which the airport has undergone in recent years.

Effective management of such complex infrastructure naturally requires an IT system that is both comprehensive and reliable which, together with the rest of the airport's operations, is run by management company Società Aeroporto Catania S.p.A. One portion of the IT environment is dedicated to administrative operations, consisting of 200 users, most of whom are connected to the internet. The applications, which have a client/server architecture



and are provided almost entirely by external vendors, require regular external access via VPN for maintenance work. In this regard, the requirements are not dissimilar to those of most organizations of a similar size.

However, the airport's centralized systems, such as the check-in desks and boarding gates, are another matter. Here the equipment is shared by various personnel who all use it to manage different airport services. Furthermore, although the terminals are not connected to the internet, they are still connected by a router to each airline company's IT systems. Because these systems are shared, it is far more difficult for the airport's IT department to maintain them than a more traditional network limited to individual companies.



Guaranteeing the security of an environment of this nature therefore requires several things to be taken into consideration, as engineer Antonio Palumbo, head of IT systems for Società Aeroporto Catania S.p.A, explains: "Preventing contact between the computer and the outside world is no longer enough to be safe from viruses or malware. For the server to be infected, all it takes is a USB stick or a malicious patch, and the whole LAN can be at risk. For this reason, our approach to security is to protect both PCs connected to the internet, with the usual vulnerabilities that this entails, and computers which carry out the sole task of managing airport services". That is why the suite of software dedicated to security must always be selected with great care. Although the original solution was abandoned as a result of increasing function-bloat negatively impacting user productivity, the package designed to replace it – despite being highly regarded within the sector – did not live up to expectations, suddenly letting a dangerous virus like Conficker through without even noticing. "The worst aspect of that infection is not being able to tell where the virus came from: it could have come from a USB stick rather than being a problem with our firewall's packet analysis function. With the software we were using back then, Conficker slipped through completely undetected", recalls engineer Palumbo. And that is without considering the complexity of having to recover public-facing machines, which are decidedly more labour-intensive than normal PCs which can be restored individually once they are disconnected from the network.

With consultancy from Alba Informatica, a company providing hardware, software and on-site support staff to the airport management company, an internal

research programme was conducted, with benchmarks carried out on various alternatives so they could be evaluated in terms of cost, functionality and ease of use. Having analysed all the options, Avira Antivir

came out on top as the chosen option, both because of the convenience of its "Switch to Avira" trade-in programme, and, above all, its features and ease of use.

"We have now been using Avira AntiVir Professional 10 for two years, with its centralized console on the server, and the results have been more than positive," continues

Avira Success Story

Palumbo. "Once the agent was installed on the client machines, we were able to carry out all tests remotely and obtain customized reports tailored to our requirements: we do not actually need to know details of the tests that went well, so much as knowing whether some dangerous code has managed to get past our checks, or whether any particular system keeps getting infected. Avira prevents us wasting time in this way too, proving how practical and efficient it is".



Ing. Antonio Palumbo, Responsabile dei Sistemi Informatici di Società Aeroporto Catania S.p.A.

Avira AntiVir, distributed in Italy by Achab, has also been recognized for how easy it is to manage, requiring no interaction beyond the usual clicks to update and monitor it. Network-wide system scanning is carried out each

week during lunch break, so that any impact on user productivity is minimized; and the migration to Windows 7, a far more complex system compared to its predecessor XP, which was a real test-bed for the efficiency of many applications, has not had any impact apart from actually leading to a small increase in performance.



Now that Avira AntiVir has proven to be the ideal solution both from a usability perspective and its effectiveness in terms of security, engineer Palumbo has the peace of mind to look to potential future development: "We are actually considering extending Avira to the information screens spread across the whole airport: there are around 150 intelligent displays running on PCs which receive up-to-date information in multicast mode. Despite their highly customized nature to specific tasks, these machines have not been immune to the occasional virus; above all, since the equipment is placed in locations which are difficult to reach, they are not easy to manually troubleshoot and restore if they are compromised".

Whatever the outcome of the cost-benefit analysis of this most recent project, Avira AntiVir still has everything required to guarantee its use at the airport for a long time: "We are very happy with this solution: maintaining the current characteristics will without a doubt be the key element," concludes engineer Palumbo. "Reliability is our absolute priority, and without that we would lose our control over time and cost, which is necessary for our organization to run as it should. Avira AntiVir has shown that we can rest assured while we focus on the work that allows us to better satisfy the users of our services".

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